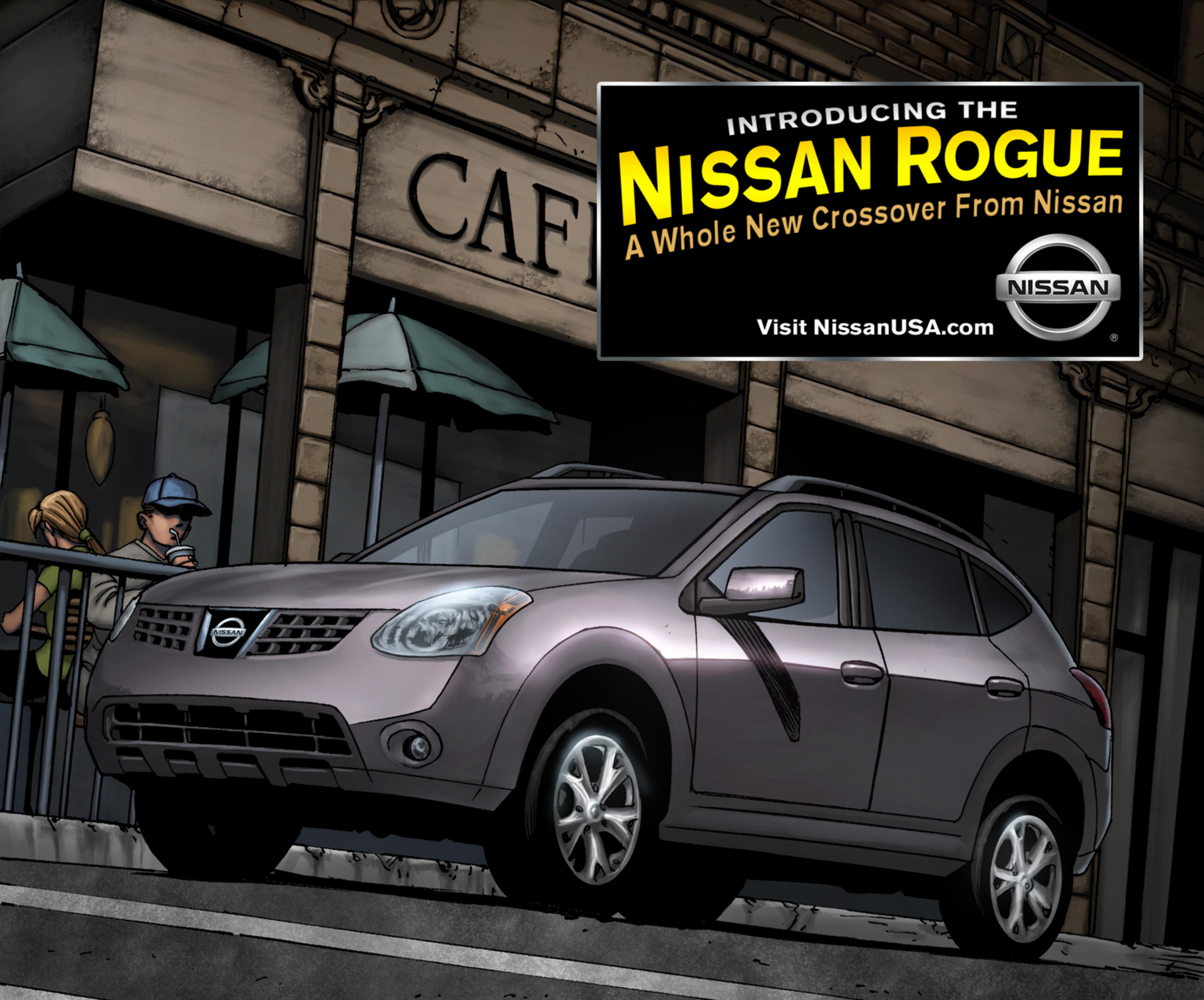


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HEROES



CHAPTER 72

PAST EXPERIENCE

When a new assignment disappoints, Kimiko Nakamura reaches back to her past to learn a lesson from one of the world's greatest heroes.

PAST EXPERIENCE

J.T. KRUL Script JASON BADOWER Art
COMICRAFT Lettering An ASPEN M.L.T. Production

TO CALL IKEBANA THE ACT OF ARRANGING FLOWERS WOULD BE TO LIKEN POETRY TO A GROCERY LIST.

IN TRUTH, IT IS AN EXPRESSION OF THE SOUL, A MEANS BY WHICH TO CONVEY THE WONDROUS BEAUTY AND SPIRITUAL ESSENCE OF NATURE.

THROUGH ITS DESIGN, ONE COULD SPEAK DIRECTLY TO THE HEART OF THE VIEWER WHO SAW IT.

BUT, NONE OF THAT MATTERED.

NOT TO MY FATHER. HE CARED NOTHING FOR THE BEAUTY IN THIS WORLD.

INSTEAD, HE LIVED IN THE PAST... RECOUNTING THE GLORY OF WARRIOR AND THEIR VICTORIES ON ANCIENT BATTLEFIELDS.

...LED BY TAKEZO KENSEI, THE GREATEST HERO IN ALL OF JAPAN, THE SAMURAI ARMY DEFEATED ONI OF TOTTORI.

IT WAS AFTER THIS FIERCE BATTLE THAT TWO SAMURAI BEGAN FEUDING OVER THE SWORD OF ONI. EACH CLAIMED TO HAVE KILLED THIRTY-SEVEN WARRIOR OF THE ENEMY ARMY; AND THEREFORE, EACH CLAIMED THE BLADE AS A PRIZE FOR THEIR VALOR.

TAKEZO STEPPED BETWEEN THE TWO SAMURAI, FROWNING UPON THEIR SELFISH BEHAVIOR. "YOU MAY WEAR THE UNIFORM OF THE SAMURAI, BUT YOU BICKER LIKE CHILDREN," KENSEI SAID.

"TRUE, EACH OF YOU FOUGHT VALIANTLY AGAINST THIS LATEST ENEMY TO JAPAN, BUT IN FIGHTING NOW WITH ONE ANOTHER, YOU DISHONOR YOURSELVES AND YOUR STANDING. USING YOUR LOGIC, THE SWORD SHOULD BELONG TO ME FOR I SLEW TWICE AS MANY ENEMIES AS EITHER OF YOU."

"BUT DOES THE SAMURAI WHO KILLS A HUNDRED ON THE BATTLEFIELD DESERVE MORE HONOR...MORE GLORY THAN THE BOY WHO SLAYS BUT ONE?"

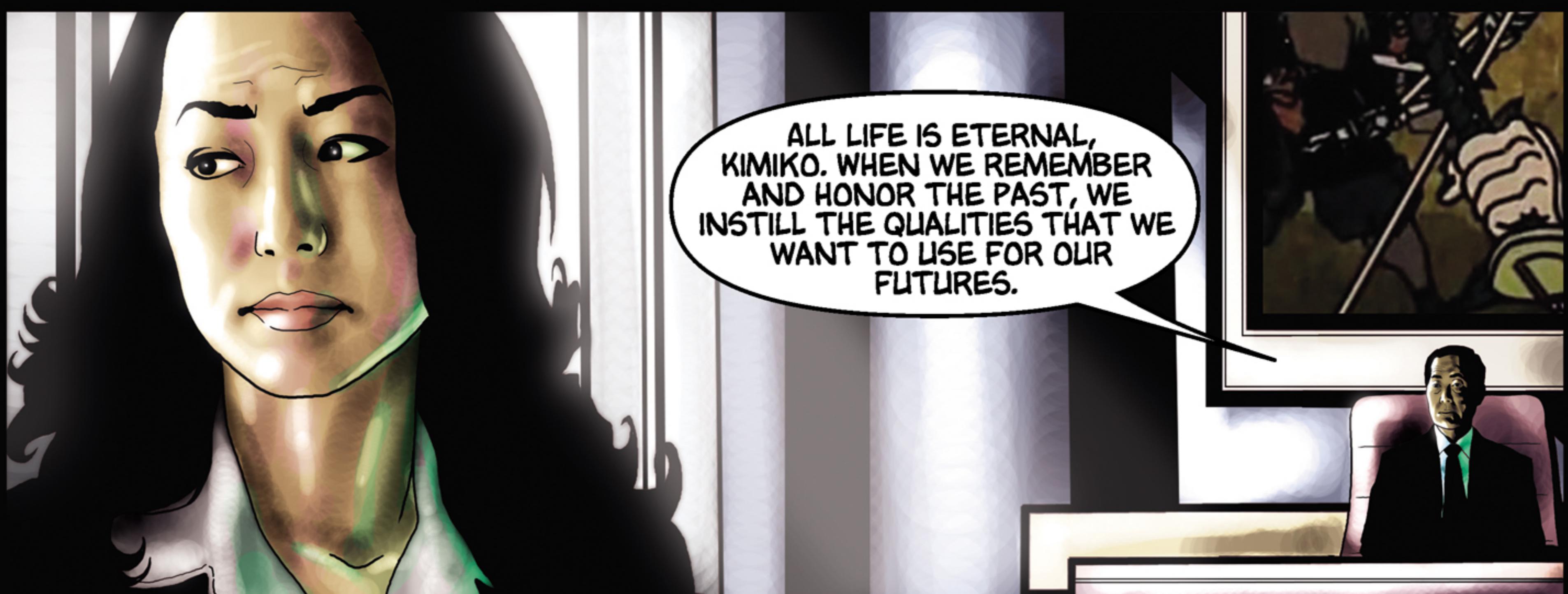
"IT IS ONLY TOGETHER THAT WE WIN. THERE IS NO INDIVIDUAL. THERE IS ONLY JAPAN."

SNAPPING THE BLADE WITH HIS OWN HANDS, KENSEI LEFT THE TWO SAMURAI EACH WITH HALF A BLADE...

...A REMINDER FOR THE REST OF THEIR DAYS OF HOW THEIR PRIDE HAD DAMAGED THEIR HONOR.

YOU SEE, HIRO, HOW THE GREAT TAKEZO KENSEI ALWAYS PUSHED FORWARD, NEVER SETTLING FOR FAILURE...IN HIMSELF OR IN OTHERS.



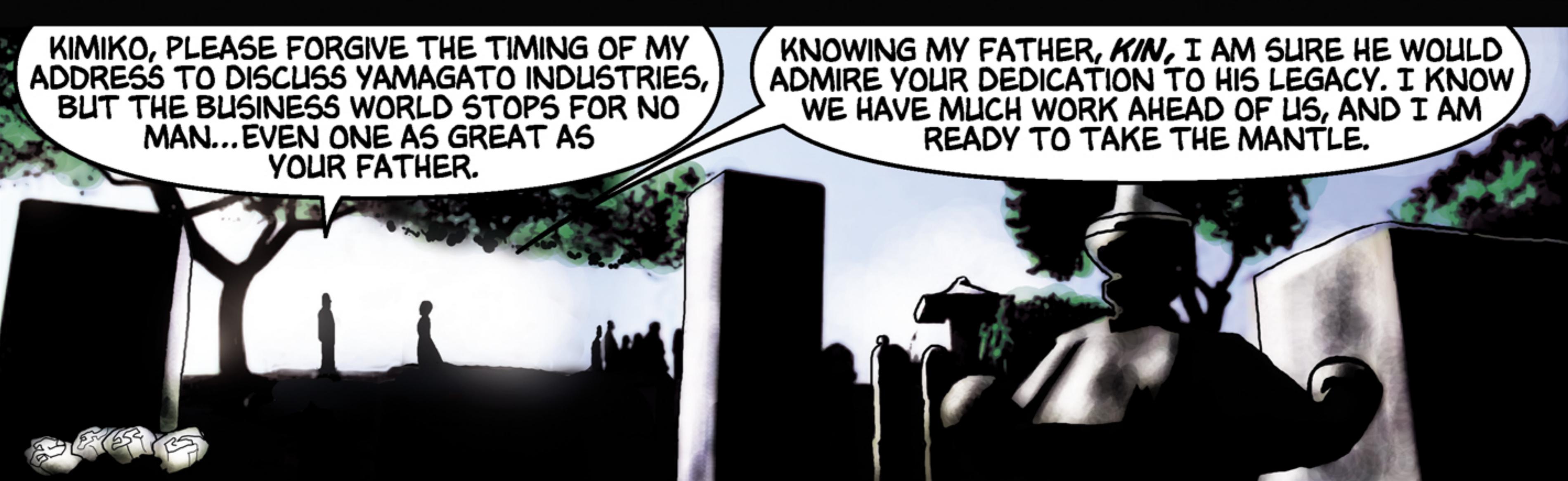




WHEN HE DIED, I WAS
DEEPLY SADDENED
BY THE LOSS.



BUT, I ALSO BELIEVED
MY FATHER WAS HAPPIER
NOW THAT HE COULD
STAND BESIDE HIS HERO
IN THE AFTERLIFE.



KIMIKO, PLEASE FORGIVE THE TIMING OF MY
ADDRESS TO DISCUSS YAMAGATO INDUSTRIES,
BUT THE BUSINESS WORLD STOPS FOR NO
MAN...EVEN ONE AS GREAT AS
YOUR FATHER.

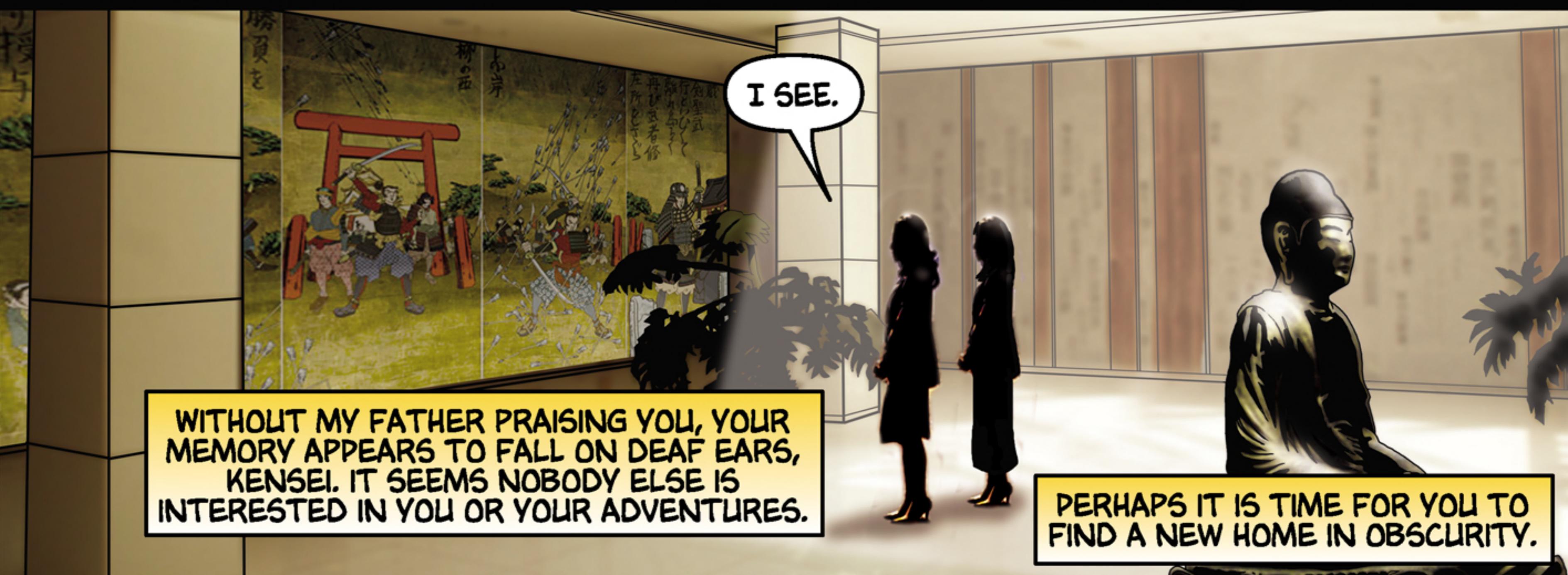
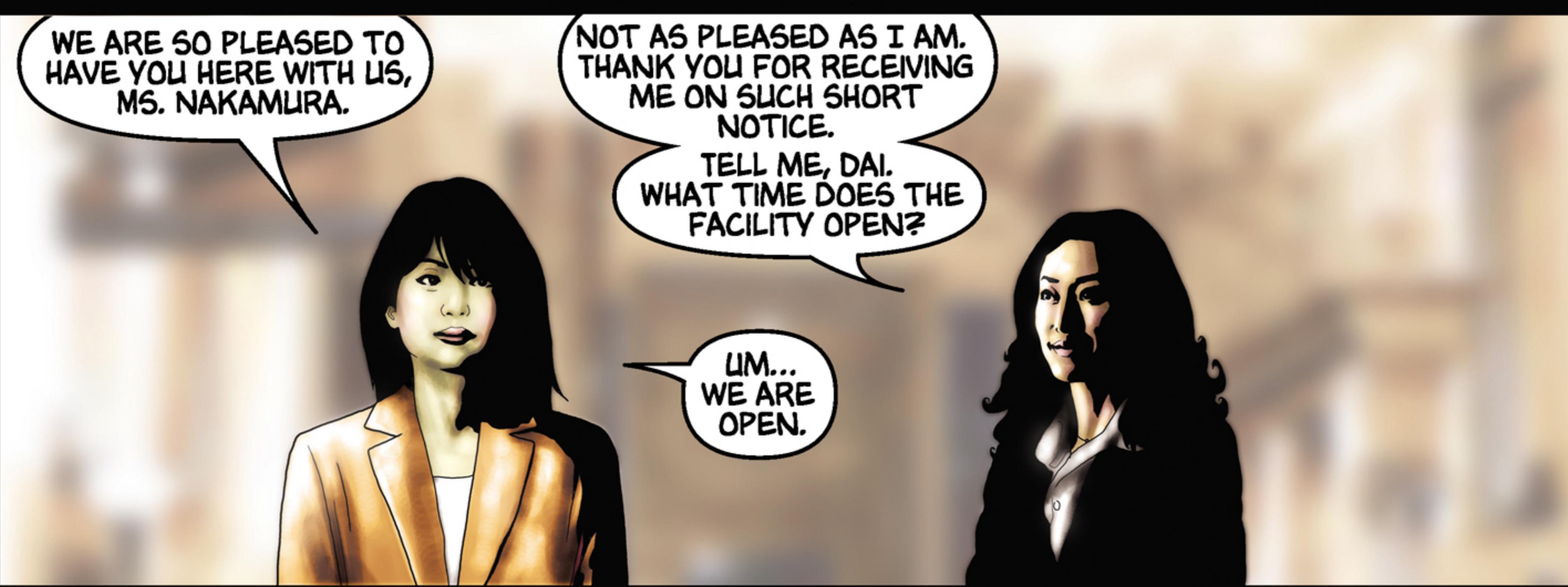
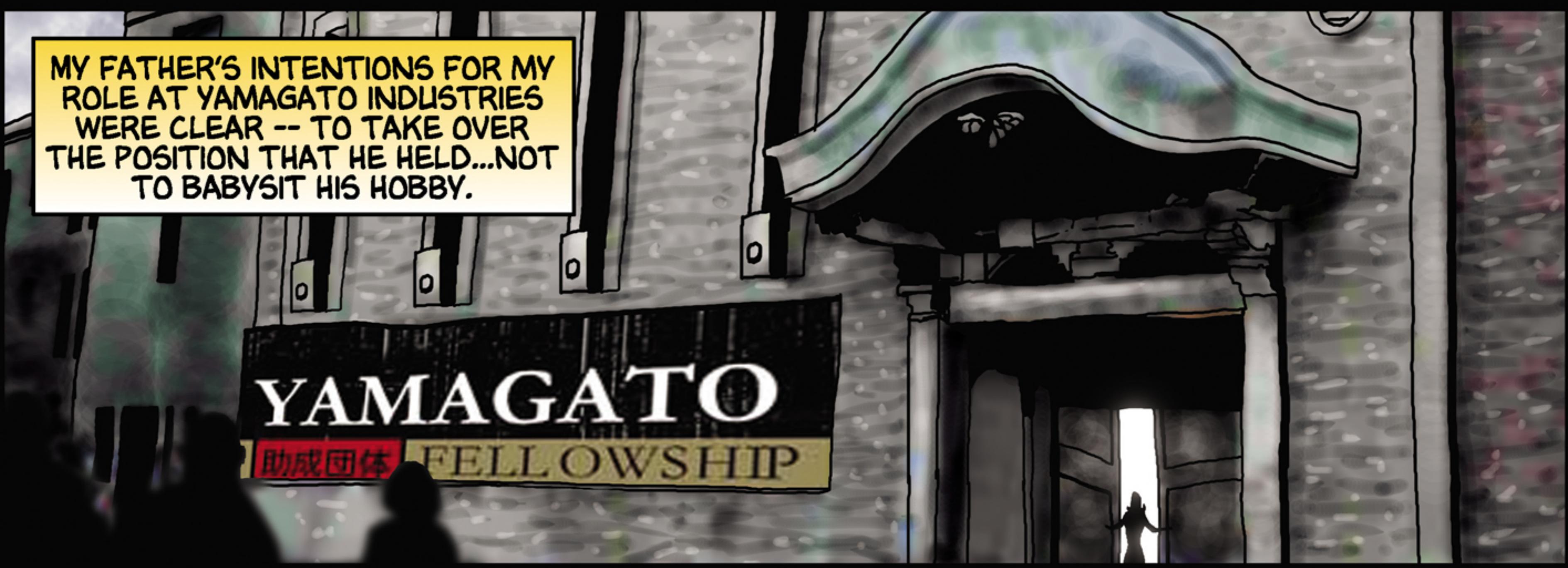
KNOWING MY FATHER, *KIN*, I AM SURE HE WOULD
ADMIRE YOUR DEDICATION TO HIS LEGACY. I KNOW
WE HAVE MUCH WORK AHEAD OF US, AND I AM
READY TO TAKE THE MANTLE.



ACTUALLY,
KIMIKO, IT IS HIS
LEGACY PROJECT
THAT NOW SUFFERS
FROM A LACK OF
LEADERSHIP...



...THE YAMAGATO
FELLOWSHIP.



I HAD NO INTENTION OF BEING EXILED FROM MY POSITION. I NEEDED TO BE STRONG...FOR MY FATHER AND FOR THE COMPANY ITSELF.

KIMIKO NAKAMURA
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

SHOURAI SENT THIS NEW PDA IN APPRECIATION FOR OUR CONTINUED SERVICE OF THEIR NEEDS. BEING THE PRIMARY EXECUTIVE FOR THEIR ACCOUNT, NATURALLY IT SHOULD GO TO ME.

HAI, JIRO IS THE PRIMARY EXECUTIVE; HOWEVER, THE GIFT WAS ADDRESSED TO ME FOR MY EFFORTS IN OUR LATEST MATTER. MS. NAKAMURA, SURELY IT WAS SHOURAI'S DESIRE FOR ME TO RECEIVE THE GIFT.

AS I LOOKED UPON THE FIGURE THAT I HAD DESPISED SINCE CHILDHOOD, I FINALLY REALIZED WHAT MY FATHER HAD MEANT ALL THOSE YEARS.

THE PAST...IT COULD SHOW ME THE WAY.

YES, JIRO AND TARO, YOU BOTH SERVE SHOURAI WELL. BUT DO YOU NOT RELY UPON EACH OTHER? AND THE RESEARCHERS, ACCOUNTANTS, AND ADMINISTRATORS? AS WELL AS THE BOARD MEMBERS OF YAMAGATO INDUSTRIES THEMSELVES?

YOU BOTH SADDEN ME WITH YOUR PETTINESS, AND YOU SHAME YOURSELVES.

THIS IS NO PLACE FOR SUCH BEHAVIOR. YOU MUST LEARN THAT THERE IS NO JIRO OR TARO HERE...

THERE IS ONLY YAMAGATO!

THAT'S RIGHT, DAI...BIG PLANS. WE WILL EXPAND THE YAMAGATO FELLOWSHIP ONLINE TO SPREAD OUR MESSAGE ABOUT THE POWER AND IMPORTANCE OF **HEROES** TO THE WORLD. IF WE CANNOT BRING THE PEOPLE TO THE FELLOWSHIP, THEN WE SHALL BRING THE FELLOWSHIP TO THEM.

YES, A DAINTING TASK, BUT MY FATHER NEVER SETTLED FOR FAILURE...AND NEITHER WILL I.

END